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ANTI-COMMUNIST POTENTIAL OF
VIETNAMESE LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

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I. Nationalism in relation to anti-Communism

Nationalism is a powerful force in Vietnam, probably more so than in India or Indonesia. There is thus no lack of an emotional and rational basis for a strong anti-Communist movement. But the fact is that Vietnamese individuals and organizations have not rallied strongly to the present government despite years of urging by the French, Vietnamese, and American governments. There is little chance of changing their minds until they are more fully able to get what they want.

They want: a) the elimination of French power; b) a Vietnamese government which is reasonably responsive to the popular will and welfare.

French power in Vietnam is a reality, not a delusion in the minds of Vietnamese soreheads. It cannot be talked out of existence by quoting the preambles of French-Vietnamese treaties. The Vietnamese desire for freedom from the French is not inconsistent with a thorough understanding of what Communism implies, nor with an awareness that French military support is for the time being indispensable. But the Vietnamese are aware that French controls, military and other, go considerably beyond what is required for efficient prosecution of the war. Without going into details, there is ample basis for the Vietnamese suspicion that they are being asked to fight for France, not for Vietnam. An effective will-to-fight can hardly be inspired without reversing this situation.

The Vietnam government is suspect in nationalist eyes because it is too squarely under the thumb of a single man, Bao Dai. There are strong nationalist objections to Bao Dai both as a man and as an institution. As man, he lacks the clear and unswerving dedication to nationalist ideals which a really popular leader must have. As an institution -- the Chief of State -- he is too invulnerable. To participate in the government now is to be wholly at the whim of Bao Dai, with no recourse. Vietnamese complaints that the present government is undemocratic may contain a good deal of hypocrisy or naivete, but is nonetheless true that a shift toward some sort of quasi-democratic regime would have an invigorating effect on the Vietnamese attitude toward their government, and is in fact essential to a vigorous anti-Viet Minh effort.

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II. Elements in a Potential anti-Communist Coalition.

Taken as a whole, existing political parties do not present a very encouraging picture, as the enumeration below will indicate. Government surveillance and even repression of parties and individuals has stifled political activity. Even if party activity were less circumscribed than now, the lack of any means of achieving power except by winning Bao Dai's confidence or by resorting to force of arms would continue to discourage party activity and encourage warlordism. The result is that most Vietnamese parties are at least semi-secret in nature, and figures on membership and affiliation are necessarily tentative. If a strong anti-Communist coalition develops in Vietnam, it will probably be on quite a different pattern from that which is apparent today. For example, development of the great political potential of labor unions and peasant organizations has been almost completely ignored.

The strongest party in Vietnam is the Dai Viet. It is active throughout Vietnam, but particularly in North Vietnam. Its program is nationalism, and little else. It is made up principally of intellectuals, many of whom have had administrative experience dating from before World War II. It probably has several thousand hard-core members. Dai Viet members Phan Huy Quat and Le Thang hold the portfolios of Defense and Information in the present government. Nguyen Huu Tri is Governor of North Vietnam. Dang Vang Sung, the "party boss," holds no government position. Nguyen Ton Hoan is the leader of a frankly anti-Bao Dai faction in South Vietnam.

The Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang party is based principally in North Vietnam. In the past it drew its support from the Chinese Nationalist government. It probably has several thousand members and is somewhat influential, but at least one of its several factions tends toward gangsterism. Some of its members have held cabinet rank, but apparently did no work. Another party which was originally aided by Nationalist China is the Dong Minh Hoi. Other Tonkinese parties of which little is known are the Duy Dan and the Quoc Xa.

The Catholics form a large (1 - 1.5 million) and reliably anti-Communist group. Bishops Le Huu Tu, Pham Ngoc Chi, and Ngo Dinh Thuc are intensely nationalist. They are not keen about Bao Dai, but support his government to a degree. Bishops Tu and Chi have large temporal as well as spiritual power over several hundred thousand persons in their neighboring dioceses in southern Tonkin. Bishop Thuc's diocese is west of Saigon. Through hundreds of parishes under native priests, the bishops have a unique organization for the moral enforcement of their views.

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Cochinchina is the site of several organizations exercising a sort of feudal dominion over specific areas -- the Cao Dai north of Saigon, the Hoa Hao west of Saigon, and the Binh Xuyen on the outskirts of the city. The first two are religious in their origin, but are most conspicuous for their empire-building tendencies. Some of the Hoa Hao leaders are difficult to distinguish from simple gangsters. The Cao Dai exercises a fairly effective and benevolent control over its following of a million or so, and maintains an army of 10-20,000 men. It has affiliations with, and perhaps controls, a conventional political party known as the Phuc Quoc Hoi. One faction of the Cao Dai movement known as the National Resistance Front is in armed resistance against the government. Aside from the Hoa Hao, there is no organized Buddhist political movement, but there are a number of Buddhist leaders who might form the nucleus for such a movement. The Binh Xuyen is a quasi-patriotic, strong-arm outfit which derives its influence largely from its control over the largest gambling concession in the Saigon area.